

WHITE HOUSE DINNER

Who Spilled the Beans On Release of Powers?

WASHINGTON — Release of the news on U-2 flier Francis Gary Powers, dramatic enough in itself, was accentuated by the 3 a.m. timing.

The first mysterious element was introduced Friday afternoon (Feb. 9) when Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Charles Bohlen, Special Assistant on Soviet Affairs, made an unscheduled call at the White House.

This tipped off reporters that something was afoot. AP's Whitney Shoemaker said he came back that night all prepared with notes on Christmas Island (atmospheric testing), Johnson Island and everything but information on the story that actually broke.

A bigger tip-off, however, and one that paid off in news beats, was leaked to a few newsmen fortunate enough to be attending a gilt-edge gathering at the White House.

At White House Dinner

The party, a private dinner given in honor of the President's sister and brother-in-law, Jean and Stephen Smith, was just slipping into high gear when a call to the Washington Post stopped the presses at 1:25 a.m. on the late city edition run. The presses were shut down until 2:15 while a story on Powers' imminent release was being written and processed. The story said Powers would be released in a few days and that the White House would make the announcement within 24 hours.)

The New York Herald Tribune was in on the early tip. Also getting the word directly from their Man at the Party was the Chicago Sun Times. The wires briefly carried word of the Post story.

Meantime, back at the party, Press Secretary Pierre Salinger, unaware that the story was about to break in the Post, left about 2 a.m. and drove over to his office in the West Wing. Waiting to call him on the emergency line were special press conference secretaries Barbara Sue Mortensen and Charles along with Assistant Press Secretary Jay Gildner.

The information came at 3 a.m.

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ents had been notified) the others began calling correspondents. About 28 American and 26 foreign correspondents were called. (Only eight of the latter showed up but Mr. Gildner said they were mostly alerted to watch the wires.)

Tass was not called and Bureau Chief Vladimir Vashchenko indicated he was not happy about it.

Called from Sleep

However, it was undoubtedly the matter of an asterisk. Only agencies and correspondents with * before their names on the White House telephone list are marked for emergency calling. There is no * before Tass News Agency.

The story caught most White House reporters by surprise.

Called from a deep sleep and told there would be a briefing at the White House at 3:30 a.m., several reporters reacted as USIA's Jim Yankauer who said his imagination ran the gambit of possible catastrophes — including the President having a heart attack. After 10 p.m., he said, "he felt like calling his wife and telling her he was all right — she could come out of the shelter."

A book, tentatively entitled "The U-2 Affair," in collaboration by Thomas H. of the Chicago Sun Times and David Wise of the New York Herald Tribune, is scheduled for publication in the fall by Random House.